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Sarah Bernhardt Talks of Love, America, Charm, Suffrage, Husbands and Wives

"Americans Do Not Know How to Love—They Need Lessons—Charm Is Woman's Greatest Weapon—That So Many American Women Will Not Bear Children Is De-tes-ta-ble."

"Your Women Are Delicious; Your Men Are Not Their Equals—Here Your Men Are Always Together; Your Women Always Alone—Women Need the Vote, but They Need Not Be Deputies."

By Nixola Greeley-Smith.

"Love is the only justification we have for life, and children are love's laurel and reward."

"If you marry and deprive yourself of the joy of children, when you are fifty and your husband fifty-five what will you have to love madly—certainly not each other."

"Americans do not know how to love—that is, they do not love enough, and in order to acquire a needed lesson it would be well if American men could take European wives while American women sought their mates among the Latin races."

The greatest of living women among the latins—Mme. Sarah Bernhardt—supplied me with this unusual and untried formula of happiness as a little party of four women sat at luncheon yesterday in her apartment at the Hotel Marie Antoinette.

On the four sides of the green and gold salon where luncheon was served American beauties stood in rows, in slender vases of cut glass like a regiment at attention. They formed a hollow square about the little table presided over by the woman who, since I first met her seven years ago, has seemed to be the greatest feminine embodiment of personal distinction and personal simplicity I have ever met. Except for a toque, made of heliotrope blossoms and tulle, Mme. Bernhardt was all in white, a gown of satin and lace with the high Bernhardt collar and over it a coat of ermine.

The other members of the party were Mlle. Seyler and Miss Hornsby, an Englishwoman, who have been the famous actress's companions for many years. At the foot of the table scampering from one to another was Belidor, Mme. Bernhardt's little Pomeranian, who now and then stood or rose expectantly on his hind legs and begged so hard that his mistress had to interrupt the conversation to say, "Attends, Belidor, attends," though Belidor did not want to wait at all.

With the light from three windows streaming upon her, I sat beside Mme. Bernhardt for nearly two hours, and frankly I cannot understand the point of view of those who think that she has grown older than she appeared upon her last visit to the United States.

The eyes like translucent jade, the tawny hair, the quick, crooked smile, the tiger growl over every French word which contains an "r" and therefore an excuse for being tigerish, had for me the same familiar but inexhaustible Bernhardt charm. And it was charm that we began to discuss with the omelette—like a proper French luncheon the meal began with an omelette—though when we reached the coffee the talk had shifted to an unusually frank discussion of America and Americans as Bernhardt sees them.

I had asked Mme. Bernhardt which she considered the greatest feminine weapon, beauty, talent or charm. She did not hesitate a moment in her reply.

"Charm immeasurably," she replied, "both for the theatre and for everyday life. If a woman has charm she can create always the illusion of beauty—an illusion so great that beauty seems pale and cold beside it. If she has charm she has genius, but unfortunately charm, like genius, is born in us. We have it or we lack it at three months as at fifty. A little child may have charm. It may be one of many brothers, all nice little children but lacking in the charm which is, of course, merely the genius of pleasing."

When Madame Bernhardt speaks of children a special tenderness comes into her voice and you are not in the least astonished when she says to you that the greatest inspiration of her life has been her son. The great Sarah speaks of her artistic laurels deprecatingly, but when she says, "Men fils" the pride of a Cornelia is in her voice.

In discussing her love of children Madame Bernhardt said frankly that she could not understand the aversion felt by many American women for child-bearing.

"But it is detestable," she said, "de-tes-ta-ble! An American woman marries, and if she is childless what will she and her husband have to live for—when she is fifty and he fifty-five? What will they be able to love madly—certainly not each other! A child is a constant renewal of tenderness of youth. It is a very great responsibility, but that feeling of responsibility serves to feed and increase one's tenderness. I was a mother at seventeen and a half and a grandmother at forty-two. I pity the women who wait till they are twenty-five and thirty to become mothers. Why, they are fifty years old before their children are grown up!"

In defense of American women I said that so many of us have lost the answers to the great conundrums of life, Whence came I? What am I here for? Where am I going? that it is possible to feel a sense of responsibility which withholds life instead of giving it.

"Whence came we? Through love," Madame Bernhardt answered. "What are we here for? To love. Where are we going? Forward, through our children. Love is the reason and the justification of life. The good God put us here with that great gift in our hearts. I am sorry for those who do not use it."

Madame Bernhardt says "le bon Dieu" as simply and reverently as a child might. The phrase represents as concrete an entity to her as Sarah Bernhardt's does to me.

"But you Americans do not love enough," she added. "Your women are delicious. Your men are not their equals. They make America a paradise for women; they work like slaves for their wives and sweethearts; they make money—more money—and bring it to them; but they do not give their women enough of themselves. Compared with the American woman the European—yes, in France, everywhere, is a slave of man. She is under the tutelage of her husband. She cannot dispose of her own property without his signature. She is in every way his inferior. But she is loved more than the American woman. The European has for his wife or his sweetheart a tenderness, a voluptuousness of which the American knows nothing. He gives her all his leisure, and he would not consider life worth living with no leisure to give her. Here I see your men always together and your women always alone."

"On the other hand, Madame Bernhardt," I interrupted, "when the American man writes a novel he is very apt to complain of the coldness, the lack of tenderness of the American woman."

The crooked, vividly carmine smile crossed her face like a flash of sheet lightning as the inexhaustible Sarah answered:

"In that case she needs a lesson in loving. The American man should take a European wife, the American woman choose a Latin husband."

"The independence of American women might interfere with the success of your plan," I suggested.

"No," Madame Bernhardt answered. "She could teach her husband to respect her independence. You understand, I believe in the independence of women. I am for the vote. Women need it. They will get it. But I do not see that they require to be Ministers and Deputies. There is no doubt in my mind that men are stronger than women. They have a more balanced intelligence because they are not subject to the physical weaknesses of women, which must always be taken into account. We women will always need man's protection, but they are his equals and he should recognise it. Here in America you will have no trouble in getting anything you want. Your men have always given it to you. They are just and kind. The European, who loves women more, will yet refuse them justice. Perhaps the methods of the militants in England are necessary. I do not know. But I do know that women who starve themselves to death for an idea are not objects of ridicule. They interest me; they touch me very much!"

To induce Madame Bernhardt to continue what was to me a very interesting comparison of American and European men I suggested that what she regards as the American man's lack of tenderness has its compensations in his lack of jealousy.

"But why should he be jealous? Of what should he be jealous? Your women are always with other women. The European is jealous as a tiger, but he knows how to love. And to be loved when one is young, to be loved gloriously, completely, sheds a radiance over all of life; it fills a treasure house of memory; it gives a hoard which one may count over and over in the miser years of age."

The golden voice had dropped to a note of wistfulness. It seemed almost as though before our eyes the ageless Sarah was counting her precious memories.

"When Americans are an older nation they will think more highly of love, they will see the duty of having children. To-day your intellectuals, your men and women of ideas, your real aristocracy are letting their race die out. To be replaced, how? By hordes from Italy and Russia. It is not thus that a nation is made. But you will realize it.

"As time goes on," Madame Bernhardt continued, "you will think more of these things and less—much less—of money. You think too much of money. To-day if I am impressed by a personality and I ask 'Who is he?' or 'Who is she?' the American answers me, 'He is worth $15,000,000' or 'She is the wife of a multi-millionaire.' Now for me that is not an answer at all. I care nothing for what a person is worth save in his value to his fellow men."

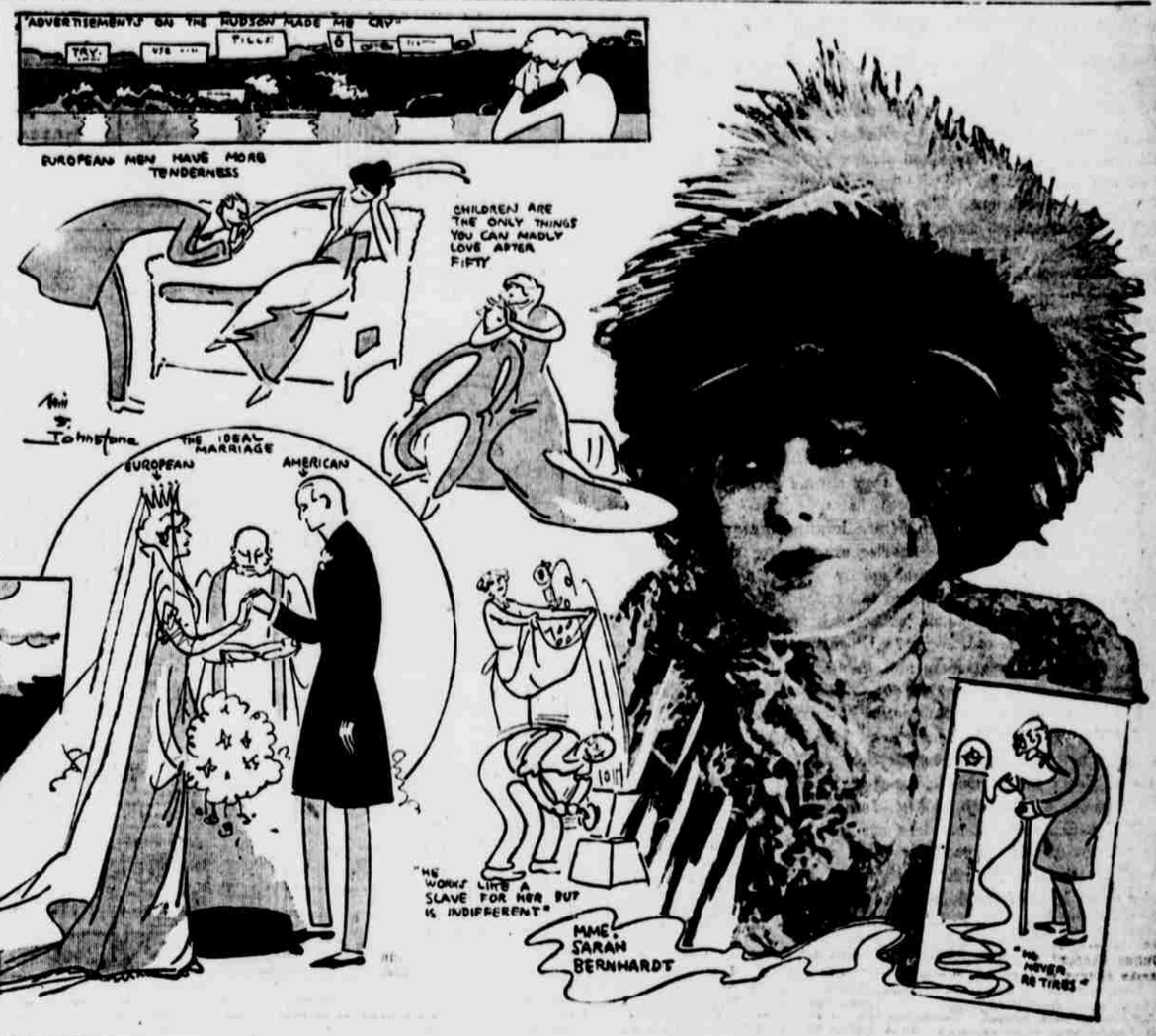
If any one doubts the sincerity of Madame Bernhardt's declaration, let him heed the fact that in her apartment yesterday every floral tribute sent her by her admirers was equally displayed. For instance, there was a little fifty cent bunch of purple sweetpeas in the chimney piece, offered probably by some poor compatriot, which looked proudly down upon the embattled American beauties lined about the walls. There were wild flowers and blossoming shrubs, dogwood lilacs, armsful of country flowers, hobnobbing with orchids. And this great friendly gathering of all the flowers—this little commune of bloom—expressed the spirit of the woman artist to whom they had been offered.

"Time will teach you other things," Madme Bernhardt continued smilingly. "You will learn, for instance, not to desecrate your beautiful country with those terrible advertising signs. In cities they are not so bad—a city can make itself a little ridiculous, but coming to New York from Cleveland recently the train passed along your beautiful Hudson. It is marvellous. But those advertisements. They were so many and so horrible that I cried—yes," Madame Bernhardt repeated tragically—"I cried.

"After a while you will learn too," resumed the incomparable Sarah when she had dried those retrospective tears over our advertisements, "you will learn that the world contains just two classes of people—its aristocracy, made up of those of ancient blood and including its artists, writers, painters, poets, great engineers, great doctors, and the other class composed of those who buy and sell—the financier, the merchant in other words, the bourgeoisie."

"We may learn that in time," I said, "but I am afraid it will be a long time. To the average American the man who gets rich making soap, the woman who marries him, are greater persons than the poet or the artist. Soap, you know, is so much more profitable than poetry and is needed by so many more persons."

The conversation was interrupted at this point by the positive insistence of Belidor, the Pomeranian, that he could not wait another minute for his luncheon. His mistress did not yield, but she reached down and petted him. And by the way, you bediamonded American stars, Madame Bernhardt did not wear a solitary jewel yesterday. Save for a very thin gold band the firm white hand which patted Belidor was ringless.



"But you will come to value artists more. I perceive changes already," Madame Bernhardt affirmed confidently. "You have such a long future, such a great future before you I can imagine no greater happiness than to be born an American woman. You alone among women are free. European woman will reach their highest destiny when they achieve your independence."

"There are those who doubt whether or not independence brings happiness to women," I said. "Pierre Loti, for instance, when he came to America recently for the production of 'The Daughter of Heaven,' said that the Turkish women are the happiest in the world. He said that women find peace and content only in subjection and seclusion."

At this Madame Bernhardt flashed me another of her lightning smiles.

"Loti is my friend," she said, "but after all what does he know about women? He cares only for the society of men.

"Here and there perhaps there still exist women of the type of the Roman slaves that lived only to minister to men and who take a kiss and a blow with equal gratitude. But they are not many and they get fewer daily. The women of the future will be the equals of man in all things, but because of their physical weakness they will not reject his protection. They will love him more and they will find always, as their grandmothers found, their greatest glory and happiness and inspiration in their children, as I have found it in my son."

It had grown to be time for Madame Bernhardt to dress for her matinee at the Palace Theatre and it seemed to me an excellent moment to leave her standing among her American Beauties with a prophecy of the future of women on her lips. As she stood the flowers drooped their heads a little. A soapmaker would have said the heat of the room had bowed their full-blown beauty. But a poet would have known they were dipping a salute to Sarah. As, according to the Bernhardt formula, the world is peopled mainly by the makers of soap and the makers of poetry, I must leave the explanation to them.

The Men From Ghent on New York's Marvels

A COUPLE of years ago Admiral Togo of Japan came to New York, was put over the high hurdles of sightseeing and the low hurdles of hospitality for six furious days—then took to his bed with a low moan and acknowledged that Tsushima was nothing like that.

Right now two hardy gentlemen of the Flemish city of Ghent are doing the same merry-go-round at whirlwind speed. Both of them have sworn a deep oath to survive and to carry back to Belgium some definite idea of New York and its et ceteras to pass on to their friends and kindred.

They are Dr. C. De Bruyne, Professeur a la Universite Echeviny de la Ville de Gand, and M. Alphonse van Werveke, Keeper of the Archives of the City of Ghent, or Gand, as the French has it. They came here to represent their city in the conferences now progressing between certain English and American gentlemen to provide a fitting celebration of the centenary of peace between the English-speaking peoples. Ghent demands representation at these conferences because it was there, in 1814, that the treaty bringing to a close the war between England and the United States was signed.

It was Dr. De Bruyne who, by virtue of his facility at the English—an accomplishment, by the way, of which he is very proud—took the part of spokesman for the two when an Evening World reporter visited them in their rooms at the Hotel Plaza.

"Kaleidoscopic!" he exploded. "That is the single word to convey my impressions of New York. "Yes, kaleidoscopic and a little bit terrible.

"Where to begin, where to find an angle of entrance in trying to convey my impressions of your tremendous city I know not. In my mind I have skyscrapers (this is a perfectly good French word), automobiles, policemen, subways, pretty women, Fifth avenue and Central Park all jumbled together. I cannot separate one thing from another. I am stupefied!

"Movement! Tremendous, restless movement—that is the one thing out of all that I can grasp intelligently!" Here the Doctor revolved his hands, one around another, in a suggestive gesture. "You New Yorkers are drunk with movement, motion, force!

"Behold—I take my stand in the middle of Fifth avenue—and it is not a place devoid of danger. On one hand are thundering automobiles; on the other hand, elephantine buses; beneath my feet the subway roars (the good Doctor was a bit off on his geography here, but allow him poetical license for the sake of the rhetorical climax) and the elevated railroad thunders a block away. What chaos! How must a foreigner like myself be stunned!

"Everybody hurries. Nobody loiters. Each rushes at his business. Why, even the policemen walk fast. You are a people of iron nerves if you can stand this.

"Now the subway. In Paris we have a subway; there is one in London, but what a difference! I go into the subway here, buy a ticket and drop it in a box. It is finished; no more trouble. In Paris I must have a man tear off a little slip from my ticket and another man collect it and another man punch it. How simple it is in the New York subway! It is practicality!"

The Doctor from Ghent was asked the same fool old question, just as an experiment: "What do you think of our skyscrapers?"

"I do not like them, they are not beautiful," he answered promptly. "Doubtless they are necessary—are very practicable—but they are not beautiful architecturally. They make me dizzy, for I come from a city where the fourth or fifth story is the ultimate one.

"Your skyscrapers are spikes in the sky!" The Doctor liked that phrase and repeated it.

"But your City Hall, ah!—that is a beautiful building. I was so surprised and so pleased when I saw it! I had expected some monstrous skyscraper and found instead this beautiful little building nestled in the hands of skyscrapers about it. It is more beautiful than our own Hotel de Ville at Ghent.